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ABSTRACT

Documentation of immersion and post-immersion (secondary level) programs in the Montreal area shows that students are switching from post-immersion to regular programs, which include French as a second language. A survey was undertaken in the spring of 1979 to assess the number of students switching out of post-immersion classes, the grade level at which they switch, and their reasons. Two-part questionnaires were distributed to 222 students who had switched to regular programs. These instruments asked for (1) background information, including languages spoken at home; (2) information on the types of immersion program they had attended; and (3) their ratings of courses in their last year of immersion and of post-immersion in terms of interest, degree of difficulty, and amount of work demanded. Finally, students were asked to give their reasons for leaving the post-immersion program. The results are summarized in the text of the report as well as in appended tables. Generally, reasons given for switching out of post-immersion programs were either the demands made by the courses or low marks achieved in the courses. However, the predominant rating given for most courses was average. It might be, therefore, that the courses were not sufficiencly interesting to warrant the amount of work they demanded. (AMH)

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Survey of Students Switching Out of Immersion and Post-Immersion Programs

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Three types of immersion programs are presently being offered by the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal (P.S.B.G.M.): early immersion, grade 7 immersion and grade 7/8 immersion. Students who have completed any of the three immersion programs continue their French studies in special follow-up or post-immersion programs. Both immersion and post-immersion programs have been extensively described and are being consistently evaluated. (For a complete overview see Genesee, 1979). Documentation of these programs shows that a number of students are opting out of the post-immersion program and switching over to regular French as a second language (FSL) classes at various grade levels. The present survey was undertaken in the spring of 1979 in order to assess the number of students switching out of post-immersion classes, the grade level at which they switch and their reasons for opting out of the program.

Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed to twelve secondary schools having a post-immersion program in grade 11 (Dorval High School, Lachine High School, Malcolm Campbell, Montreal West, Mount Royal High, Riverdale, Rosemount, Sir Winston Churchill, Verdun High, Wagar, Westhill and Westmount High). Only those students who had previously attended an immersion program but were now attending regular FSL classes completed the questionnaires. The questionnaire was anonymous and consisted of two parts. In the first

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part the students were asked to give some background information about themselves, such as age, sex, place of birth, mother tongue and languages spoken in the home. In the second part, they were asked to indicate what type of immersion program they had attended and in what grade they had switched from immersion or post-immersion to a regular FSL class. Students were also asked to indicate what courses they had taken in their last year of post-immersion and to rate these courses on a five-point scale in terms of interest, degree of difficulty and amount of work demanded by the course. Those students who had switched out of the immersion program prior to entering a post-immersion program were asked to globally rate their last year of immersion according to the same criteria. Finally, the students were asked to give the reason(s) why they had left the program. In order to find out if the choice of courses offered was a decisive factor in the students' reasons for opting out of the program they were asked what courses they would like to take in French which were presently not offered in the post-immersion program in their school.

Results

In the schools surveyed there were 864 students who had previously attended an immersion program and who were now enrolled in a grade 11 post-immersion program. Aside from the students enrolled in post-immersion programs, 222 immersion students were reported now attending regular FSL classes. Thus, 20% had switched from immersion or post-immersion programs to regular FSL classes. It should be noted that these figures do not include students who switched to schools other than the ones surveyed in the present study or students who moved out of Montreal.

Of the 222 questionnaires that were distributed 11% were not returned. Hence, the results given below pertain to 89% of the student

population which had previously attended an immersion program and was enrolled in a regular FSL class at the time the survey was conducted. It should also be noted that since the grade 7/8 immersion program was started only in 1976 none of the grade 11 students had participated in this program. Furthermore, at the time these students attended immersion programs (1973 for early immersion and 1974 for grade 7 immersion) the number of students enrolled in early immersion programs was very small (61 students were enrolled in primary 6 early immersion in September 1973 compared to 1,562 students enrolled in grade 7 immersion in September 1974). Thus, it is obvious that the proportion of grade 7 immersion students switching out of post-immersion will be much larger than that switching out of early immersion. In fact only 5% of the 198 students who completed the questionnaires were early immersion students.

Background information

The results obtained from the background questionnaire are summarized in Table 1. The majority of students (89%) were regular grade 11 students. Eleven percent of the students were, however, grade 10 students, i.e., they attended grade 10 courses in all or most of their subjects other than French. The reason they were in a grade 11 French course may have been caused by the fact that these students were more proficient in French than their grade 10 peers who did not previously attend an immersion program.

Age

Most students were either 17 (53%) or 16 (40%) years old. Only 4% of the students were older than 17, and only 3% of the students were younger than 16.

Sex

Of the students who switched out of immersion or post-immersion programs 55% were male and 45% were female. Thus, there were more male than female students switching out of these programs. Genesee (note 1) similarly found that the number of boys switching out of early immersion programs was noticeably higher, at least at the lower primary grades (K-3) than the number of girls. These findings may be related to poor achievement in the specific courses offered in the program. Burstall et al. (1974) found that in secondary schools in Great Britain, where the learning of French as a second language is optional, low achieving boys in their sample tended to drop French to a significantly greater extent than low achieving girls.

Birthplace

The majority of students (80%) were born in the province of Quebec. Only 9% were Canadians born outside of the province of Quebec and 11% were born in other countries.

Language Spoken

Eighty-four percent of the students were native English speakers. Only 4% were native French speakers. The mother tongue of the remaining 12% was mainly either Greek or Italian. With reference to other languages spoken, it is of interest to note that 76% of the students marked French as their other language, thus indicating that they considered themselves able to communicate adequately in French. Nineteen percent marked another language (mainly Greek or Italian) as their other language and only 5% indicated that they did not speak any language other than English.

Switching Point

The majority of students (48%) switched from the post-immersion program to a regular FSL class at the beginning of grade 9. Since 93% of all the students switching were grade 7 immersion students this means that most of these students opted out of the program after one year of post-immersion. Twenty-two percent of the students switched at the beginning of grade 8. This means that most of these students took only one year of immersion and never enrolled in the post-immersion program. Eighteen percent of the students switched at the beginning of grade 10, thus attending two years of post-immersion. Finally 8% of the students switched at the beginning of grade 11, thus attending three years of post-immersion. Of the early immersion students only 2% switched in grade 7, i.e., after one year of post-immersion. Proportionally early immersion students may thus remain longer in post-immersion programs than grade 7 immersion students. These findings have, however, to be interpreted with care since the proportion of early immersion students in the group is very small. Furthermore, since a change of school is involved between grades 6 and 7, some students who completed grade 6 of the early immersion program may have switched to a secondary school having no post-immersion program and would thus not be included in the present survey.

Course ratings

In order to try to determine whether course content or the degree of difficulty encountered by students influenced their decision to opt out of the immersion and post-immersion programs the students' ratings of the courses they had taken in the post-immersion classes and the global ratings for the grade 7 immersion program (in case they had switched prior to entering a post-immersion program) were examined. Each course was rated according to three dimensions: interest, difficulty and amount

of work invested. Aside from the global grade 7 immersion ratings, six courses were rated: French Literature, History, Geography, Mathematics, Science, Art and Music. There were too few instances of French Literature ratings, consequently this course was not included in the analysis. Furthermore, although the questionnaire had indicated that only courses taken by the students in the year prior to their switching to a regular FSL class were to be rated, some students rated all the courses they had taken in post-immersion. Finally, not all the students rated each of their courses on all three dimensions. Since we were interested in the students' ratings as a general indicator of their evaluation of post-immersion courses in terms of the three dimensions noted above, all ratings were included in the analysis. The results pertaining to the course ratings are given in Tables 3, 4 and 5. Since the number of students was not the same for all the courses rated, the exact distribution of the ratings is given in Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Interest

The distribution of the ratings shows that all courses except Art and Music were considered averagely interesting (Table 3). However, when the ratings across the entire five-point scale are examined for each course some interesting differences emerge. Art and Music were rated highest with respect to interest (38% of the students who took the course rated it as very interesting whereas only 15% rated it as not at all interesting). It should, however, be noted that this course is offered only by very few schools. Consequently the number of students in the present survey who participated in these courses is very limited. Science was also rated very positively (23% of the students who took the course rated it as very interesting and only 9% rated it as not at all interesting). By contrast History was rated as very interesting by only 10% of the students and as not at all interesting by 23% of the students. These results seem to indicate a high preference for Science and Art

and Music courses and a low interest in History courses. Furthermore, if the entire range of the scale, excluding the middle point, is considered, we find that all of the subjects aside from History were rated positively with respect to interest. It is noteworthy that the grade 7 immersion program ratings show an even distribution between average, interesting and very interesting. Only 27% of the students rated the program below average in interest. It would thus seem that the students feel positive about this program.

Difficulty

The distribution of the ratings pertaining to the degree of difficulty shows that the majority of students did not feel that the courses were excessively difficult. However, aside from Art and Music, very few students rated the courses as very easy (Table 4). It is of interest to note that the distribution around the three center points of the five-point scale is much broader than in the case of the interest dimension, so that there is less of a trend to judge the courses as averagely difficult. Mathematics was most frequently rated as very difficult (18% of the students who took the course rated it as very difficult, whereas only 1% rated it as not at all difficult). Science was rated as very difficult by 16% of the students and as not at all difficult by 6% of the students. History was similarly rated as very difficult by 13% of the students and as not at all difficult by only 4% of the students. If we again consider the entire range between the middle point of the scale and the two extremes we find that History, Mathematics and Sciences were rated as more difficult than Geography and Art and Music. The grade 7 immersion program had the most even distribution of ratings. Fifteen percent of the students rated the course as being very difficult, another 15% rated it as being not at all

difficult. The remaining ratings were evenly distributed among the three middle points of the scale.

Amount of work invested

The distribution of the ratings pertaining to the amount of work demanded by each course is similar to that noted for interest in that there is a strong central tendency to consider the course as averagely demanding, except in the case of Art and Music (Table 5). History was rated as very demanding by 12% of the students whereas only 2% of the students rated the course as not at all demanding. Mathematics was rated as very demanding by 16% of the students and not at all demanding by only 7% of the students. When the entire range between the middle point of the scale and the two extremes is considered, we find a tendency to rate all subjects, aside from Art and Music, as being demanding. The global rating of the grade 7 immersion program shows that the students were about evenly distributed with regard to the demands they felt the program had made on them. Nineteen percent of the students rated the program as very demanding, another 19% rated it as averagely demanding and 12% rated it as not at all demanding.

Reason for switching

The question pertaining to the reason for switching asked whether the student had opted out of the program because of his/her low rating on the three dimensions discussed above. More than half of the students who answered this question (61%) responded affirmatively. Since interest did not seem a major source of dissatisfaction, the answers suggest that the students who switched out of post-immersion found the courses either too difficult or too demanding. A related reason for switching may have been low achievement in those courses which were rated as difficult or demanding. It should be noted that, in order not to embarrass the students, the question did not

directly ask whether they had switched because of low marks. Nevertheless half of the students did not respond to this question. Of the 39% who gave other reasons for switching, 20% voluntarily indicated that they had left the program because they had failed one or several courses. The other 19% gave various other reasons. Problems in scheduling and the need to concentrate on other subjects (mainly Mathematics and Science, which are not commonly offered in French in the higher grades) were the most frequent reasons stated. Some students indicated that they feared they were falling behind in English. Finally, some students stated that parental or teacher recommendation had caused them to leave the program.

Courses wanted

The students indicated a broad range of courses which they would have liked to take as part of a post-immersion program (Table 6). It is interesting to note that 31% indicated Social Studies (History, Geography and environment) as a course they would like to take. The next highest ranking course was oral French (17%). Mathematics (including Computer Science) and Science (Chemistry, Physics and Biology) were requested by 15% and 12% respectively. Courses in Business, Economics and Commerce were suggested by 14% of the students. Finally, 11% gave a variety of other courses such as Drama, Art and Music, Sex Education and Drug information.

Discussion

Two noteworthy findings emerge from this survey. On the one hand, the students did not indicate that they had switched out of dissatisfaction with the program. The main reasons given for switching were either the demands the courses had made on the students or the low marks they had achieved in the courses. On the other hand, the predominantly average interest rating given to most courses suggests that the courses themselves

may not have been motivating enough to justify the work invested in them. It is interesting that History was a frequently requested course in spite of the fact that it had rated lowest with respect to interest. It is possible that the students' concept of a History course is one that deals with current events. The finding that a considerable percentage of students requested a course in oral French also shows that these students are concerned with the applicability of course content to their future needs. It may be worthwhile to take these points into consideration in the planning of post-immersion courses. Another point to consider is the finding that almost half of all the students who completed the questionnaire switched out of the program after just one year of post-immersion. It would seem advisable to examine the grade 8 post-immersion program in terms of the students' scholastic achievements as well as the students' interest in this program at the time they are enrolled in it.

Reference Notes

1. Genesee, F. Survey of students switching out of the early immersion program. Instructional Services Department, The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, Montreal, September 1978.

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Burstall, C., Jamieson, M., Cohen, S., and Hargreaves, M. Primary French in the balance. A report of The National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales. Great Britain: N.F.E.R. Publ. Co., 1974.

Genesee, F. Les programmes d'immersion en français du Bureau des Ecoles Protestantes du Grand Montréal. Québec: les presses du Service des impressions en régie du Bureau de l'Editeur officiel du Québec, 1979.

Table 1

Background Information

(Total number of students, n = 198)

	Number of Students	Percentage
Age		
15 yrs	6	3%
16 yrs	79	40
17 yrs	106	53
18 yrs	7	4
Sex		
M	108	55
F	90	45
Birthplace		
Quebec	159	80
Canada outside Quebec	18	9
Other country	21	11
Mother tongue		
English	166	84
French	8	4
Other	24	12
Second languages spoken		
French	151	76
Other	38	19
None	9	5
Languages spoken at home[a]		
English	191	96
French	21	11
Other	33	17

[a] Since sometimes more than one second language were spoken at home, total percent does not total 100.

Table 2

Immersion Type and Switching Point

(Total number of students, n = 198)

	Number of Students	Percentage
Immersion type		
Early	9	5%
Grade 7	185	93
Not available	4	2
Switching Point		
Grade 7	4	2
8	43	22
9	95	48
10	36	18
11	16	8
Not available	4	2

Table 3

Percent Ratings Indicating Student's Interest in the Courses According to a Five-Point Scale

	Not at all interesting 1	2	3	4	Very interesting 5
History	23	19	29	19	10
Geography	11	20	31	20	17
Mathematics	12	17	36	25	10
Science	9	15	25	28	23
Art and Music	15	23	8	15	38
Total Immersion	15	12	24	24	24

Note: Percents are rounded off and therefore do not always total 100.

Table 4

Percent Ratings Indicating Student's Difficulty in the Courses According to a Five-Point Scale

	Very difficult 1	2	3	4	Not at all difficult 5
History	13	25	40	17	4
Geography	8	23	32	30	8
Mathematics	18	23	29	29	1
Science	16	31	24	24	6
Art and Music	10	0	10	0	80
Total Immersion	15	24	21	24	15

Note: Percents are rounded off and therefore do not always total 100.

Table 5

Percent Ratings Indicating Student's Amount of Work Invested in the Courses According to a Five-Point Scale

	Very demanding 1	2	3	4	Not at all demanding 5
History	12	26	40	19	2
Geography	6	28	34	17	15
Mathematics	16	20	30	26	7
Science	6	29	39	20	6
Art and Music	33	0	17	8	42
Total Immersion	19	22	19	28	12

Note: Percents are rounded off and therefore do not always total 100.

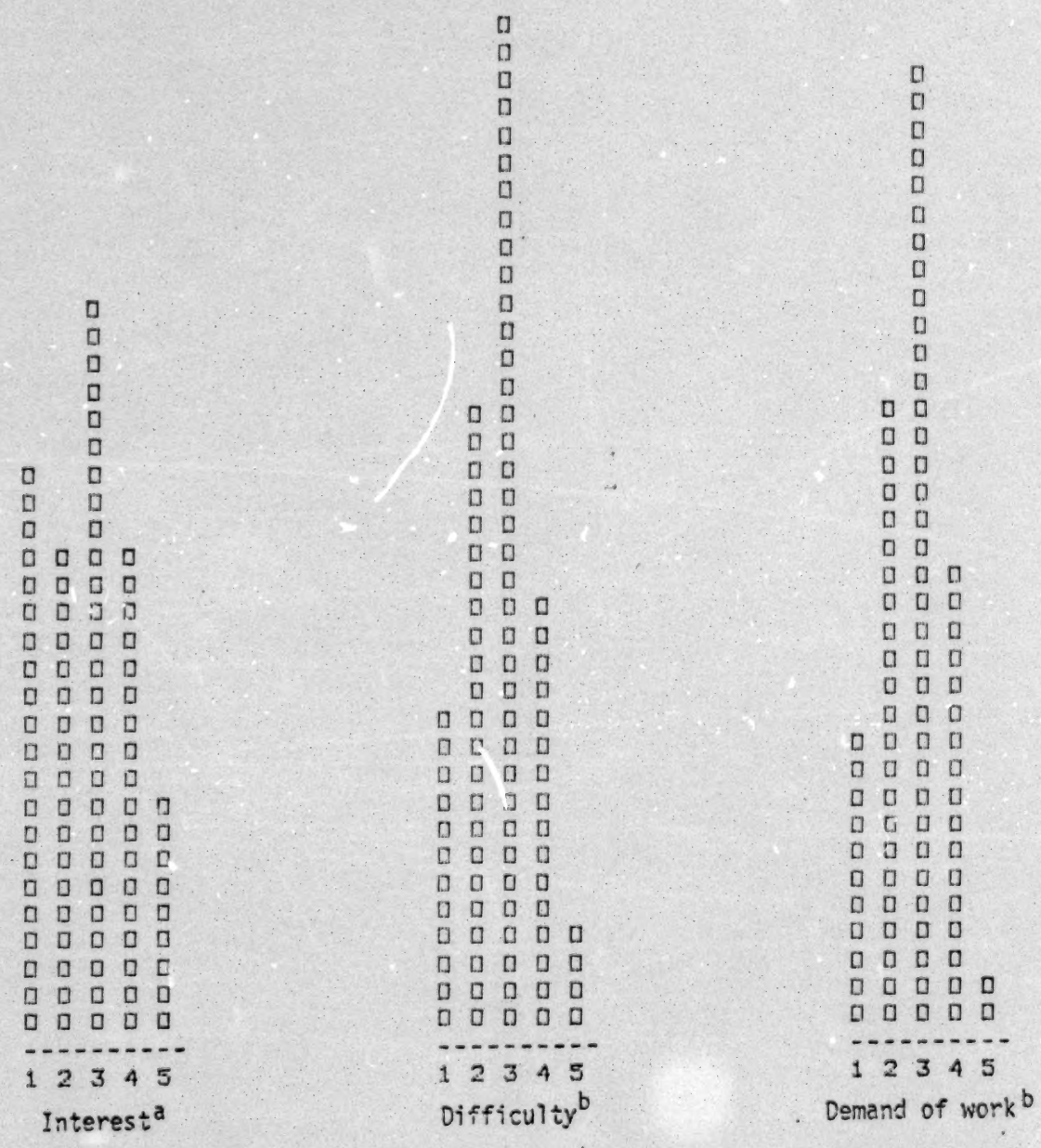
Table 6

Reason for Leaving and Courses Wanted

	Number of Students	Percentage
Reason for leaving (n = 99)		
Low course rating	60	61%
Failure	20	20
Other	19	19
Courses wanted [a] (n = 125)		
Social Studies	52	31
Oral French	28	17
Mathematics	26	15
Business	24	14
Science	21	12
Other	18	11

[a] Some students indicated more than one course.

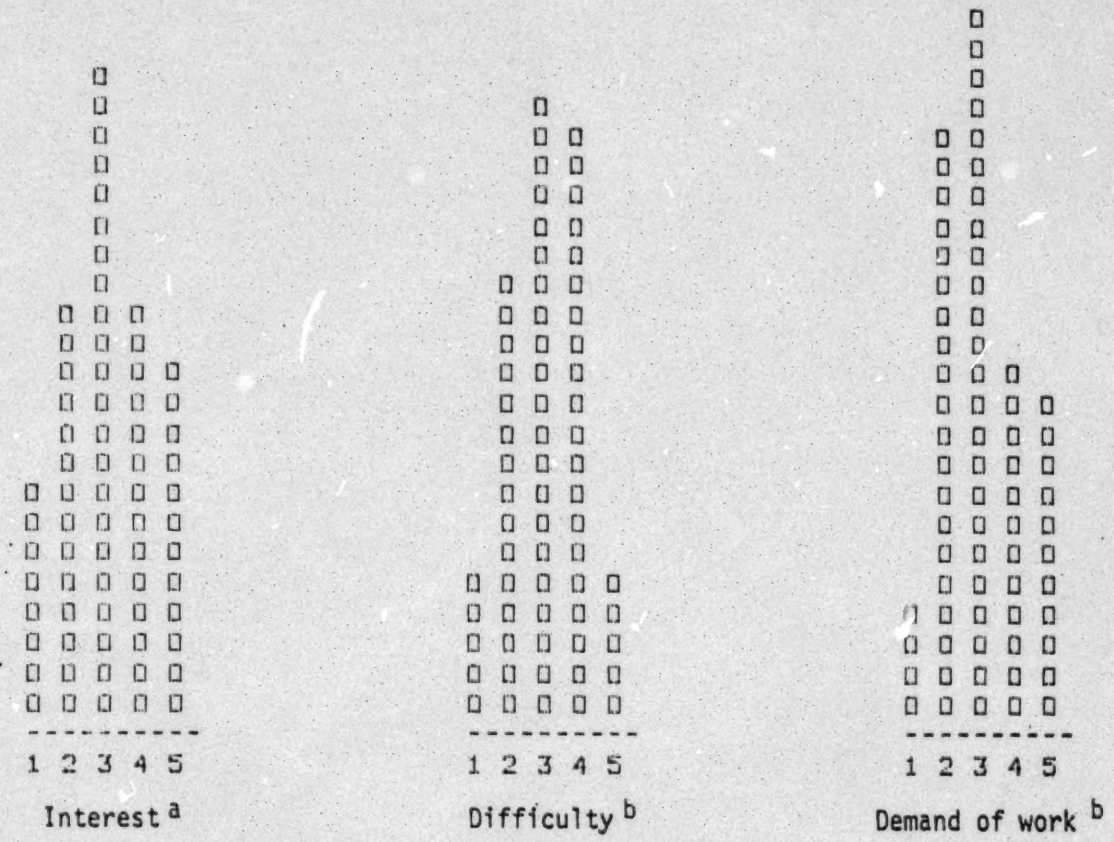
Figure 1: History



a Ratings for interest go from not interesting to very interesting.

b Ratings for difficulty and demand of work go from very difficult/demanding to not difficult/demanding.

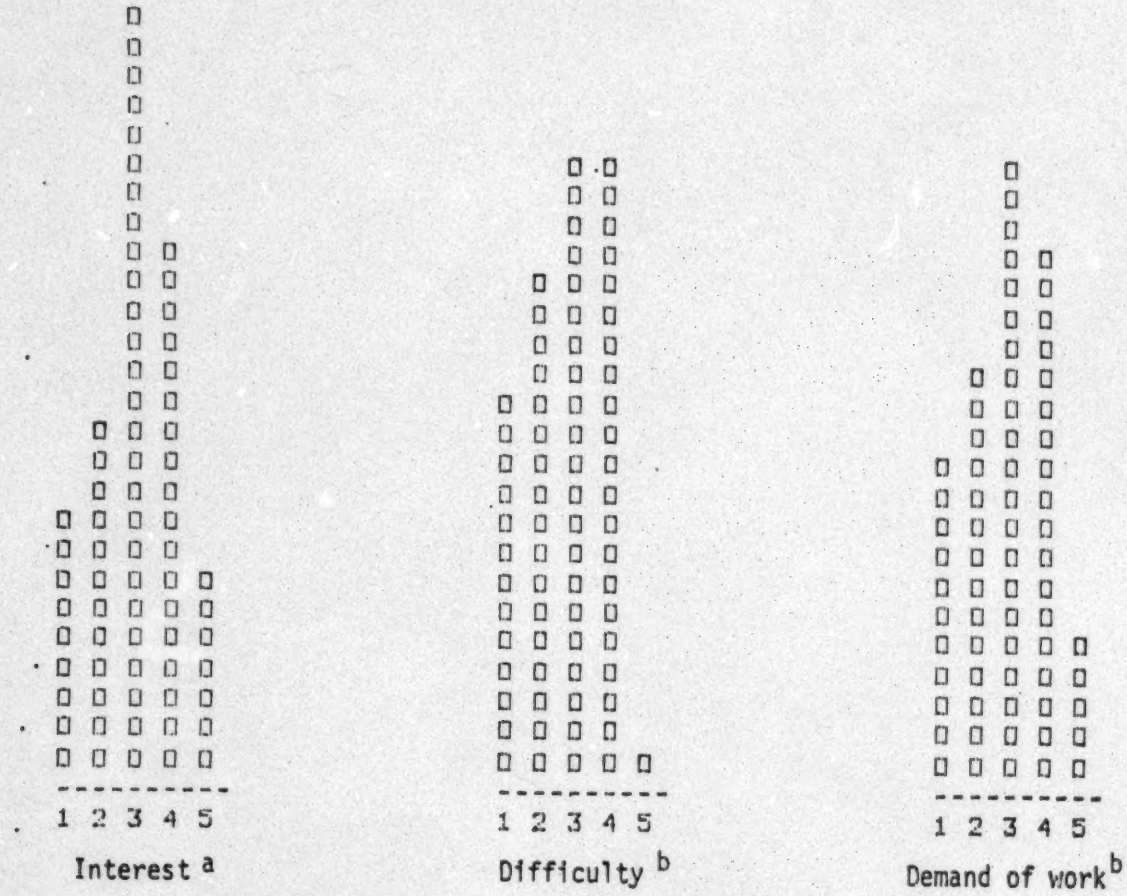
Figure 2: Geography



a Ratings for interest go from not interesting to very interesting.

b Ratings for difficulty and demand of work go from very difficult/demanding to not difficult/demanding.

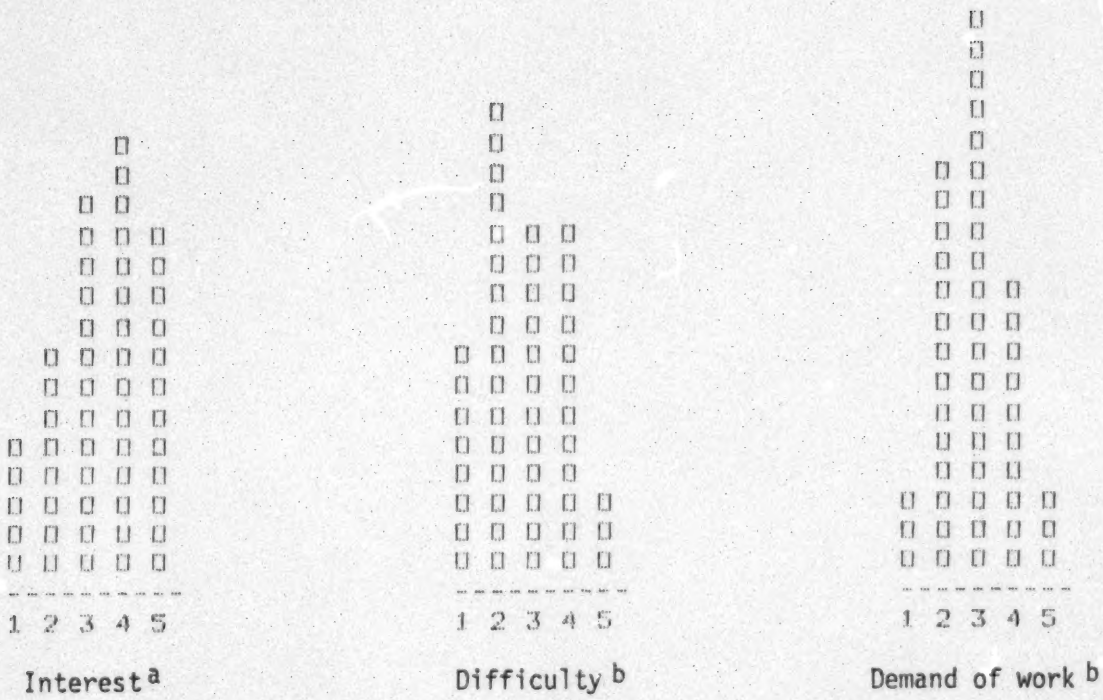
Figure 3: Mathematics



a Ratings for interest go from not interesting to very interesting.

b Ratings for difficulty and demand of work go from very difficult/demanding to not difficult/demanding.

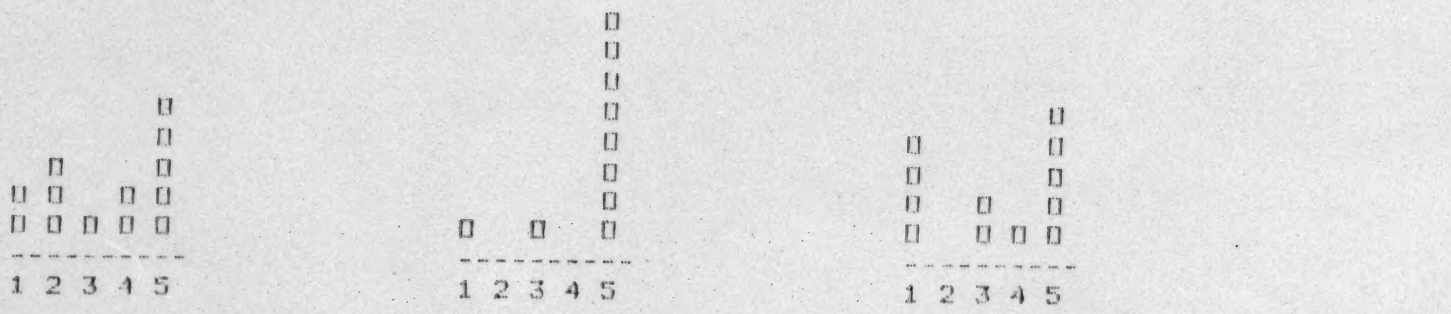
Figure 4: Science



a Ratings for interest go from not interesting to very interesting.

b Ratings for difficulty and demand of work go from very difficult/demanding to not difficult/demanding.

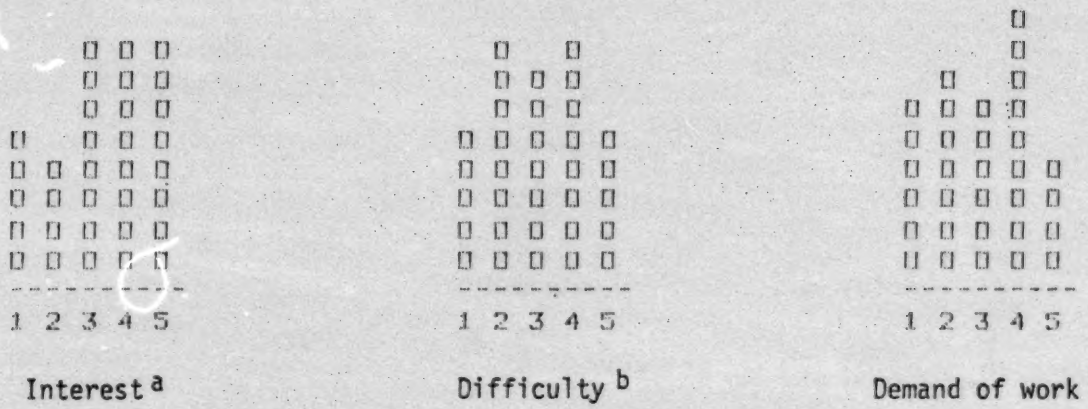
Figure 5 : Arts and Music



a Ratings for interest go from not interesting to very interesting.

b Ratings for difficulty and demand of work go from very difficult/demanding to not difficult/demanding.

Figure 6: Total Immersion



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